

THE

HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

April 2011

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, April 21, 2011, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Tish Williams, Executive Director of the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, April 20**, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

Volunteers

Volunteers of all kinds are welcome to help at the Lobrano House. We can use typists, yard workers, gardeners, organizers, etc. Please call 467-4090 to volunteer.

We also need people to help us identify many still unidentified photos in our extensive collection.

In addition we accept articles for inclusion in *The Historian*.

Thanks to those members who continue to give of their time and talents.



A 14085 Oyster Factory, Bay St. Louis, Miss.

Peerless Oyster Factory in the background
Private bath houses in the foreground

SEAFOOD CANNERIES IN BAY ST. LOUIS

By
Eddie Coleman

There were two prominent seafood canneries in Bay St. Louis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. G. W. Dunbar Sons established an oyster and shrimp canning company on North Beach Blvd. at the north end of present-day Dunbar Ave. The Peerless Oys-

ter Company was located on North Beach Blvd., where North Second Street intersects with Beach near the site of the Bay-Waveland Yacht Club.

G. W. Dunbar Sons Canning Factory was opened in the early 1880's to process oysters and shrimp from the Mississippi Sound. It was operated by two New Orleans brothers, George W. and Frank B. Dunbar. To process the seafood, workers were brought in from Baltimore, MD. Many of them were Austrians and Slavs. To attend to the spiritual needs of these workers and local

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Marianne Pluim, Webmaster**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**MISSION STATEMENT**

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

residents, Father Henry LeDuc of Our Lady of the Gulf Catholic Church built St. Joseph's Chapel on the corner of Dunbar Avenue and Blakemore Streets. He also established a school which opened in the community on July 15, 1896.

The Dunbar Sons Canning Company was virtually destroyed in 1893 by a hurricane which hit the Mississippi Gulf Coast. However, it was completely rebuilt and in full operation by 1896 when H.S. Evans, a reporter for the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, passed through Bay St. Louis traveling by rail from the Pearl River to the Alabama line.

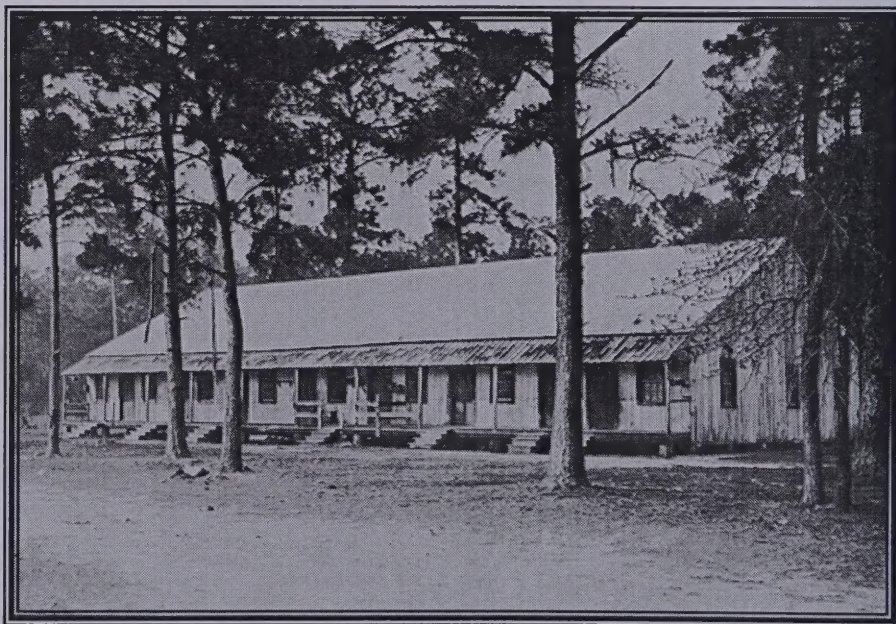
The Dunbar Sons also had at least one other seafood processing plant on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, this one in Biloxi. By the time of its closing sometime after 1912, but before 1917, the Dunbar plant in Bay St. Louis was known as the Dun-

bar-Lopez Dukate Co. The plant was dismantled in Bay St. Louis and moved to Violet, Louisiana.

The second prominent seafood cannery in Bay St. Louis was the Peerless Oyster Company, which began operations on October 31, 1904. The president of the company was Charles H. Torsch of Baltimore, MD, who also had a cannery in that city.

The main building of the factory was constructed in a very short time with Henry Widener, owner of Standard Electric Company of New Orleans, building and wiring its electrical plant. It also had its own fire department and shipyard with “marine ways capable of raising any size boat up to 85 feet in length” (Dyer).

In its heyday the factory consisted of five buildings with the main factory containing shucking rooms, shrimp rooms, and warehouses. The seafood moved from the boat at one end of the plant through each proc-



One of the labor camps for workers at the Peerless Oyster Company. Several families lived in this one building. A 1917 Sanborn Map shows three building like this one and several smaller buildings labeled “Workmen’s Quarters.”



Young factory workers during the short noon recess, a time many young workers used to play "catch up"

essing room until the product reached the last building and was ready for shipping throughout the United States and Canada.

In addition to the main factory, Peerless Oyster Company furnished lodgings for its workers. These tenements and workmen's quarters were built on Second St. across North Beach Blvd. from the factory. At 3:00 A. M. factory workers were called to work by a shrill whistle at the plant. (City residents weren't too happy with being awakened in such a rude and abrupt manner either.) Thus began the long day for the shrimp pickers and oyster shuckers who stood for hours doing their work.

Such harsh working conditions were difficult enough for adults, but not all of the workers were adults. This was the time before national child labor laws had been enacted, and some of the workers were as young as age three! According to Carole D. Bos, J. D., in an article entitled "In the Canneries," "Maude

Daly (age 5) and her sister Grace (age 3) each picked about one pot of shrimp a day (in 1911) for the Peerless Oyster Company in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi." Another youngster, John Velcich, at age ten had worked for the factory for three years. By this time he was earning fifty-five cents per day. Many of the workers complained of sore and swollen

hands from the picking and the acid in the shrimp.

During the off season when seafood was not harvested, the Peerless factory canned vegetables. In 1922 farmers in Hancock County were encouraged to plant larger crops to sell to Peerless for canning, for which they received top prices. In addition to seafood, vegetables, and fruit, the factory canned turtle meat which was harvested from the turtles kept in pens at the factory. In fact, several members of the society remember that as children they delighted in seeing the turtles in their pens on the property.

The Peerless Oyster Company remained in operation until it was destroyed by the Hurricane of 1947. Nonetheless remnants of its existence can be found on the small peninsular where it once stood. Oyster shells which were discarded in the processing of the seafood can be found in abundance around the Bay-Waveland Yacht Club.



Eleven-year-old Sadie Kelly picked five pots of shrimp at Peerless Oyster Factory on this day in March 1911
Notice the shrimp pot in her right hand.

SOURCES:

Bos, J. D., Carole D. "In the Canneries." *Awesome Stories* 24 Feb. 2011 <www.awesomestories.com/history/child-labor/in-the-canneries>.

Dyer, Charles Lawrence. *Along the Gulf*. New Orleans: William E. Myers, Pub., 1894; Gulfport, MS: The Dixie Press, 1971.

Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Publishing Corp., 1999.

Sullivan, Charles L. and Murella Hebert Powell. *The Mississippi Gulf Coast: Portrait of a People*. Sun Valley, CA: American Historical Press, 1999.

REVIEW OF MY MISSISSIPPI FAMILIES: HOME, AT LAST

By

Ronnie Margaret Farris McGinnis

Outstanding for its genealogical and historical content, this library quality, hard-bound book culminates thirty-five years of genealogical research by Ronnie McGinnis, established editor and former publisher of two quarterlies on Mississippi ancestors and past president of two state genealogical organizations.

Three of the more than eighteen primary families featured in the 550 plus page book should be of great interest to Hancock County genealogists: the families of Juan Cuevas, Julius C. Monet, and David Evans. Juan Cuevas of Cat Island married Marie Helene Ladner, and they were parents of twelve children. One of their sons, Raymond, married twice.

His first wife was his cousin, Isabella Penalver. After her death in 1849, he married Desiree Irma Marie "Emma" Monet, daughter of Judge Julius C. Monet and Louisa Martelli. Judge Monet was the first mayor of the town of Shieldsboro, later changed to Bay St. Louis. Raymond and Irma had five children. The third family with a Hancock County connection is David Evans, who married Susannah Rosier in Lawrence County in 1822 and later moved to Hancock County. David and Susannah were the parents of twelve children. Three of the Evans girls married three Baggett brothers of Harrison County.

Among the other primary lines in the book is Isaac Carter, one of the three brothers who served in the Revolutionary War and settled in what became Jackson and Perry Counties. Some of the primary families featured in this book are Carpenter, James, Foster, Clawson, Brown, Farris, Kelly (two separate lines), Buie, Patterson, Smith, Lemons, and Myers.

The book's narrative is typed in large font for easier reading and contains pertinent citations. The full name index has approximately 750 surnames and twenty-five hundred first names. Lagniappe is a section featuring autobiographies of three family members who were children of the Great Depression and young adults during World War II.

The book costs \$75, postpaid, and can be ordered directly from her at 1500 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211.

BOOKS FOR SALE AT LOBRANO HOUSE

Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

A nostalgic keepsake of the city's history including descriptions and pictures of many of the historic buildings and houses especially those along Beach Boulevard prior to Katrina

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Red Robin Pie*

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and Paul Estronza La Violette (\$25.00)

An annotated cookbook of Gulf Coast recipes

Heritage Cookbook

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A collection of our members' favorite family recipes

Holly

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

An intriguing anthology of tales of a tomcat living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

Katrina Cookbook

By Charlet Russell (\$19.95)

A collection of recipes by Bayou Tours

One Dog, Two Dogs, Three Dogs, Four...

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

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Scrapbook of Treasured Memories

By Connie Heitzmann and Betty Stechmann (\$20.00)

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Sink or Be Sunk

By Paul La Violette (\$30.00)

A recounting of the naval battle in the Mississippi Sound preceding the Battle of New Orleans in 1812

Vintage Photographs of Hancock County

By

Lori Gordon

(\$15.00 per photograph)

These photographs come from the vast photographic collection of the Historical Society. Each photograph has been restored and matted by local artist Lori Gordon.

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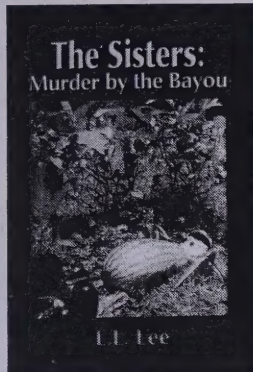
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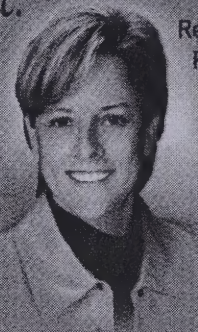
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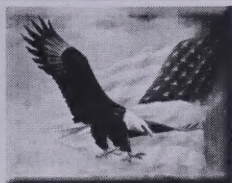
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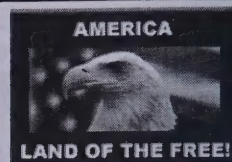
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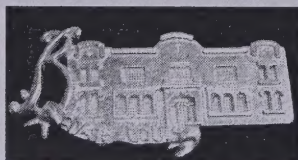
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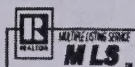
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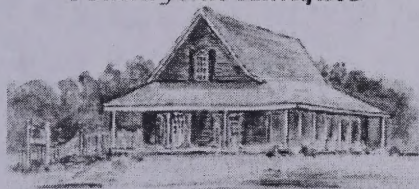
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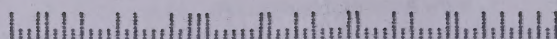
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